

A musicologist speaks

Dr Ashok Ranade is a man of many facets – musician, writer, teacher and an expert in Indology and Ethnomusicology. Currently Assistant Director (Research and Ethnomusicology) at the National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay, Dr Ranade is producing a 'Festival of Music' which will be performed in December. Shamali Gupta profiles the versatile musicologist.

WHAT strikes viewers of Dr Ashok Ranade's various programmes on television, are his brilliant, sparkling eyes and the crisp, clear voice with which he gives lucid explanations and assessments of various musical concepts. And unlike other personalities who put on a different face for the press, the same sparkling eyes and quiet, warm smile welcomes the members of this fraternity, too, when they choose to visit him. But then Dr Ranade is a different personality, altogether. He is an Indian classical musician, viewing music from different angles – from the angle of a singer, a grammarian, an aesthetician and a writer," he says. He learnt music from stalwarts like Gajananrao Joshi, Laxmanrao Bodas and B.R. Deodhar and obtained his Sangeetacharya from the Gandharva Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. He states, "music has become my channel of expression and I have tried my best to bring people closer to classical music."

Dr Ranade was the first Director of the University of Bombay's Music Department, and he held this office from 1968 to 83. During those fifteen years, he has attempted to synthesize the *gurushishya parampara* with modern

amenities like a music library and a well-equipped recording studio. He also conducted a number of workshops on music appreciation and voice-culture. He recounts this phase as having been extremely fruitful. "I had been exploring a novel approach to facilitate an easy understanding of the Hindustani tradition of classical music by organising the conceptual and terminological material thematically. My visit to Oxford when I was elected to the Coulson Indology fellowship, brought me in contact with rare documents and ancient manuscripts on Indian music. And my ideas took shape in the book *Keywords and Concepts in Hindustani Music*.

He has many more books to his credit including *Sangeetache Saundaryashastra* (dealing with the aesthetic rationale which operates in performing traditions), *On Music and Musicians*, *Stage Music of Maharashtra* and *Stravinskyche Sangitik Saundaryashastra*, in which, he says, "I have attempted to construct a concise and coherent statement about Igor Stravinsky's isolated ideas on musical aesthetics, especially concentrating on concepts likely to possess transcultural validity."

Dr Ranade has conducted a series of lecture-

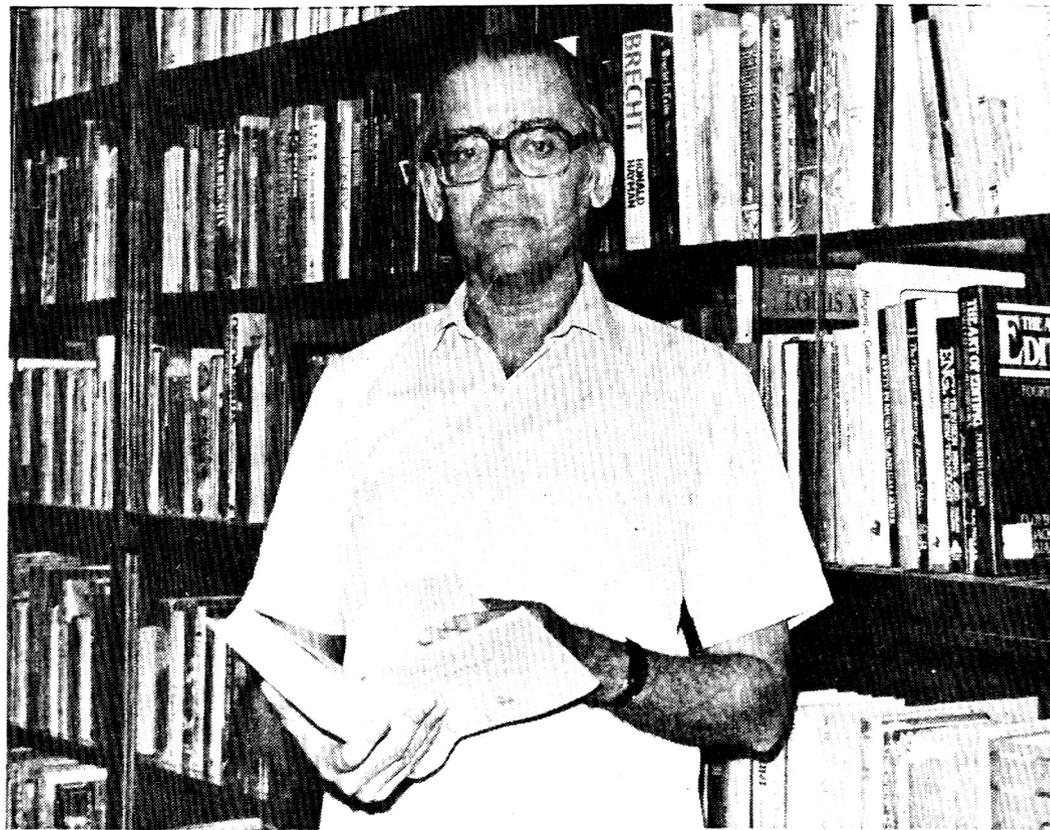
demonstrations in Russia and a study tour to China on behalf of the Government of India. But back in the University, he felt that "the mechanism was restricted and I was beginning to repeat myself. It was at this juncture that I realised I needed a change, and plunged into the study of Ethnomusicology."

He explains the term ethnomusicology, as "the comparative study of music cultures. Music is an active agent of social change. In fact, we ethnomusicologists believe that all non-musical behaviour is related to music in some way or another. This field of study arose in the 19th Century when the eastern and western cultures came face to face and it became necessary to understand the importance of music in relation to culture and vice versa."

Dr Ranade became the Associate Director – Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology, of the American Institute of Indian Studies. He has been the first to set up the systematic study of Ethnomusicology in India. "Tradition does not bind a person down, in fact, the cultural framework is extremely essential and it acts as a launching pad for every musician," he says.

A scholar of deep learning and wide culture which divides itself in some strange though harmonious diarchy; Dr Ranade's brilliant mind touched by western influences responded eagerly to the challenge and stimulus of modern thought and revelled in the miracle of modern progress. But his spirit, proud and jealous of its splendid heritage, sought its sanctuaries of delight and consolation in the glory of the secular classical art of ancient India.

Dr Ranade has based his



Dr. Ranade: dedicated to the cause of music

ethnomusicological research on musical experiences, which he has differentiated into five categories namely, primitive, folk, art, devotional and popular music. He has composed music for exhibitions like *Akar*, an exhibition on the calligraphy of different countries, in which he related and blended this non-musical aspect with the music of individual countries. He has also scored the music for documentaries like *Baba amte* and *The Singing Line*.

Currently, Dr Ranade is Assistant Director (Research and Ethnomusicology) at the National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay. Here, he has

been working on projects of theatre development and workshop in documentation of performing arts. He has composed music for several plays including the widely acclaimed *Ek Zunj Waryashi* for which he received the State Award for best music direction.

"At the N.C.P.A, I have produced a number of programmes like *Sawan*, *Baithakichi Lavani* and I am currently doing extensive research for an underproduction festival of music, with 'Religion and Music' as its theme," says Dr Ranade. It is to be performed in December, and we have

included *Sufi* songs, *Baul*, *Asthapadi*, *Quawali*, *Padavali* and *Haveli sangeet*."

In fact, on the last day of this Festival of Music, Sri P.L. Deshpande and Dr Ranade will present the *Devvani* of Maharashtra.

And what does he plan to do next? Dr Ranade smiles rather enigmatically and says, "Ours is too vast a country too vast a culture and we have too vast a musical system. India is a challenge to me and everything I do is one little effort to counter this challenge." His modesty, perhaps forbade him from speaking further. But his quiet smile revealed that it would be something worth writing about!